

International Federation for LET Systems Interoperability

Prospectus February 1, 2007

1 Introduction and Invitation

Interested organizations are invited to participate in the formation of a future-oriented, global collaboration to advance the interoperability of technical systems enabling learning, education and training (LET) through the use of reference models based on de jure standards. The working name for the proposed organization is The International Federation for Learning-Education-Training Systems Interoperability (LETSI). The anticipated participants are government agencies, organizations developing LET specifications or standards, and organizations representing LET communities of practice.

This Prospectus sketches the proposed purpose, structure, governance, funding options and activities of the LETSI collaboration. It describes a “Startup Phase” during which the collaboration’s Charter will be defined. It solicits the sponsorship of a Founding Committee, composed of parties interested in shaping the Charter and making LETSI a reality. Finally, it announces the kickoff meeting for the Startup Phase on March 18, 2007 in London, England.

For more than a decade, leaders in the field of technology-enabled LET have identified critical interoperability issues such as the exchange of content, learner information, assessments and competencies. It is widely agreed that interoperability standards and associated technical infrastructure can substantially reduce the cost of developing and delivering technology-enabled LET and will broaden choices, promote adoption, improve quality and encourage innovation.

Several existing organizations develop interoperability specifications and standards for technology-enabled LET. Examples include the AICC, ARIADNE, CEN/ISSS WSLT, DCMI, IEEE LTSC, IMS, and SIFA. To date, no organization has achieved the critical mass or global presence required to deliver on the universal value proposition once envisioned for LET interoperability. While each has a valid perspective, none can offer a complete solution in a field whose members are fragmented along dimensions of geography, intended LET community, business model, and operating principles.

The remedy to this situation is effective, coordinated collaboration among the many organizations around the world focused on learning technology and interoperability. LETSI is intended to enable this collaboration. The well-known Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM), a profile of specifications and standards that addresses the interoperability of LET content, is an example of the potential results of collaboration. SCORM profiles specifications and standards developed by the AICC, IMS and IEEE LTSC, and has been under development by the US Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative (ADL) for nearly a decade. It has achieved

broad international adoption and has been submitted to ISO/IEC JTC1 SC36 for formal consideration as an international standard.

To start LETSI with significant momentum, the ADL proposes to vest LETSI with the future stewardship of SCORM. To maintain continuity for the global SCORM community, the ADL intends to help sponsor LETSI when it is formally chartered and to actively participate in the continued evolution of SCORM and the development of new LET interoperability reference models.

2 Purpose

The purpose of LETSI is:

- to enable organizations with a material interest in learning, education, training (LET)
- who agree to accept a set of organizing principles
- to participate in evolving broadly applicable LET Interoperability Reference Model(s)
- informed by shared priorities and requirements
- based initially on the Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM)
- and to define and actualize related events, publications, technologies, and services
- through a process that is transparent, democratic and sustainable.

3 Principles

LETSI will be a federation of organizations. Member organizations shall endorse the following principles:

1. There are societal, economic and educational benefits to establishing a global interoperability framework for technology-enabled learning, education and training (LET).
2. Technology-enabled LET encompasses many diverse and unique communities of practice and must accommodate this diversity and the financial realities of the various communities.
3. A key to establishing a global LET interoperability framework is to define broadly applicable reference models that:
 - support and promote interoperability for LET technology;
 - may be easily profiled by LET communities of practice;
 - are based on *de jure* standards;
 - may be obtained and implemented without royalties; and
 - are adequately supported through events, technologies, and services.
4. The first successful and broadly applicable LET reference model is the Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM), which should become the first of many anticipated reference models in an evolving, overarching LET Interoperability Reference Model.

5. It is necessary and desirable for organizations with a material interest in LET to collaborate and to coordinate their efforts in a manner that:
 - promotes understanding of the principles and importance of LET systems interoperability;
 - is accessible to members from all nations and actively encourages participation;
 - follows a democratic process based on consensus, openness, balance and due process; and
 - develops and implements a sustainable business model.

4 Benefits

The anticipated benefits from creating the LETSI Federation include:

- voluntary global adoption and adaptation of LET interoperability based on de jure standards
- effective global coordination and sharing of resources applied to LET interoperability
- a means for local innovations to be considered by a global community
- risk and cost reduction through broadly accepted solutions
- faster creation and integration of LET content and technical systems
- increased market size for LET technologies
- more effective technology-based LET
- by extension, outreach and technology transfer to formal and informal learning communities within member nations and institutions

5 Initial Assumptions

LETSI will develop broadly applicable reference models based on open specifications and de jure standards which address critical, shared problems of interoperability as identified by its members.

LETSI is not intended to replace the current functions of organizations that develop specifications or standards, or that serve the requirements of particular communities of practice.

An important LETSI service will be to facilitate coordinated collaboration among members whose interests differ along dimensions of geography, LET market segments, business models, and operating principles.

LETSI will not, itself, develop the specifications or standards used in the reference models it develops. However, qualified member organizations of LETSI may develop these documents.

LETSI will not, itself, develop reference models that address the requirements of particular geographies or LET communities of practice. However, members may support these communities of practice by adapting the generic reference models developed by LETSI to satisfy their particular requirements through the process of profiling.

6 Organizational Details

6.1 Organizational Type

LETSI shall be constituted as or within a not-for-profit, non-government entity having multiple administrative units. These shall be located in different geographies to address the diversity of national or regional perspectives on LET interoperability. The organization shall be open, democratic, and inclusive.

6.2 Name

LETSI (The International Federation for LET Systems Interoperability) is the working name of the new organization. The Founding Committee may change the name during the Startup Phase (see Section 10 below).

In any case, the name of the Federation shall include terms that reflect some or all of the following semantic components:

- geographical coverage: e.g. “global” or “world” or “international;”
- organizational model: e.g. “assembly” or “committee” or “congress” or “consortium” or “federation;”
- intended community: “learning, education, training (LET)” is the internationally vetted ISO/IEC phrase to cover all forms of learning;
- technical coverage: e.g. “interoperability” or “learning infrastructure” or “e-learning.”

The name shall be in English but shall have acceptable translations in the top 5 World languages as ranked by numbers of native and secondary speakers (Mandarin, English, Hindustani, Spanish and Russian according to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_speaker_data)

6.3 Membership

Membership is open to organizations, not to individuals.

Membership shall be open to any organization

- that is a legal entity under a UN-recognized nation;
- with a material interest in learning, education, training;
- that agrees to accept LETSI’s principles (see Section 3); and
- that agrees to accept and abide by LETSI’s legal, operational and financial requirements imposed by the policies, procedures and bylaws

Candidates for membership include:

- government organizations and agencies
- for-profit businesses
- educational, academic and research institutions

- LET industry consortia
- not-for-profit associations
- standards-development and specification-development organizations

During LETSI's startup phase, the Founding Committee will determine what types of organizations can participate in what way as well as any requirements for membership.

6.4 Organizational Structure

It is envisioned that LETSI shall be comprised of the following entities:

- **Members**, who are organizations characterized in Section 6.3.
- **National or Regional Administrative Units** with associated **paid administrative staff** whose purpose is to administer and support the business of the organization, including managing finances, organizing meetings and events, managing publications and Web sites, and facilitating work with standards- and specification-development organizations.
- A **General Assembly** consisting of one representative from each member. This is the ultimate governing body. The general assembly shall meet at least once per year. *Each member organization shall receive one and only one vote in the general assembly.*
- A **Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary** who are nominated and elected by either the General Assembly or by the Board, as determined by the policies established during the Startup Phase (below). These officers are tasked with coordinating the administrative units, making day-to-day decisions, representing LETSI, interacting with existing and potential members, and conducting meetings. The recommended term for officers is two years.
- A **Board** (or steering committee, or policy committee) consisting of members nominated and elected by the General Assembly, plus the officers (who shall be voting members), and possibly including others, such as ex-officio members. The Board will meet regularly and is responsible for setting policy and taking actions on behalf of the general assembly, subject to approval of the general assembly in the cases to be defined in the bylaws. The specifics of Board membership, including number, composition, and voting policies, will be established during the Startup Phase (below).

All details about the organization, including its structure, membership, activities, and budget will be finalized by the Founding Committee in the Startup Phase.

6.5 Member Roles

Beyond basic membership, some types of organizations may be eligible to perform one or more specialized roles with associated responsibilities in support of LETSI. These roles will be determined during the Startup Phase. Examples of some possible roles are:

- Member organizations that represent national or regional governmental entities may support a national or regional administrative unit of LETSI. These units might, for example, translate documents, host native-language websites, organize local meetings, oversee conformance testing, and so on.

- Member organizations that represent communities of practice may develop authorized profiles of the reference models supported by LETSI.
- Member organizations that represent specification development organizations or standards bodies may provide the specifications used in reference models developed by LETSI.

7 Deliverables

LETSI shall at a minimum be responsible for the following deliverables:

- an annually updated roadmap of specifications, standards, and reference models determined by the membership to be of general significance for LET interoperability and organized into the categories of R&D, specification, trial implementation, de jure standard.
- an annually updated assessment of high-priority unmet needs and requirements for LET interoperability.
- reference models of general significance for LET interoperability that are based on open specifications and standards and that are components of an evolving and overarching LET Interoperability Reference Model. SCORM 2004 3rd Edition shall be the first reference model supported by LETSI.
- events, technologies and services of general significance related to the development, maintenance and dissemination of the LET Interoperability Reference Model(s).
- an annually updated plan of operations.

8 Financial Model

LETSI's operations shall be supported through a combination of membership dues, in-kind contributions, endowments, and branding or licensing fees. A critical task for the Founding Committee in the Startup Phase is to determine a viable and sustainable financial model for the Foundation. The following are notional descriptions of possible resources.

8.1 *Membership Dues*

Dues for Member Organizations shall be set by the Board in accordance with the principle of enabling access to organizations from any nation. Dues may vary by geographic region and by organization size or type. Any fee structure shall not create a barrier to broad participation.

8.2 *In-kind Contributions*

In-kind contributions include donated staff, expertise, facilities, or technologies. For some types of organization, such as those representing communities of practice, in-kind contributions may be a more valuable and feasible contribution than paying membership dues. This substitution, if allowed, is not intended for commercial or for-profit organizations.

8.3 Endowments

Organizations may provide endowments in lieu of dues. Endowments will carry permanent membership. The minimum size for an endowment contribution shall be 10 times the appropriate annual dues.

8.4 Branding or Licensing Fees

It may be reasonable for LETSI to solicit branding or licensing fees for related events such as conferences or workshops. Again, all revenue possibilities will be discussed by the Founding Committee during the Start-up Phase.

9 Startup Phase

LETSI shall begin in a Startup Phase to initiate skeletal operations and to debate and resolve questions related to scope, membership, structure, governance, policies, and finance that must be addressed before LETSI can become fully operational.

The Startup Phase shall begin on March 18, 2007, at a meeting in London, England. The Startup Phase shall last for a period of no more than one year.

9.1 Startup Phase Organizational Structure

The Startup Phase shall be under the aegis of a Founding Committee.

The Founding Committee shall be composed of a representative from interested organizations that pledge a one-time fee of \$10,000 to participate in the formation of LETSI. To acknowledge their significant historical contributions to the development of SCORM, a representative from the ADL, AICC, IMS, and IEEE LTSC will be invited to participate in the Founding Committee at no cost. Because the success of LETSI will ultimately depend on balanced, international participation, it is emphasized that the invitation to participate in the Founding Committee is a global invitation.

In the Startup Phase, the Founding Committee will finalize the details of the Charter, establish LETSI as a legal entity, determine the initial operating budget and revenue model, and initiate operations. Each member of the Founding Committee will have a single vote in collective decision making. The Founding Committee may invite others to join in an advisory or support capacity. As plans for LETSI take shape, the Founding Committee is expected to operate in a completely transparent fashion and to broadly solicit feedback from candidate LETSI members.

9.2 Startup Activities

The Founding Committee will set the initial membership dues and fee structures for all members and will address the following additional aspects of the LETSI Federation:

- refine purpose and scope
- form a legal entity
- determine structure and governance
- set association requirements and categories
- define deliverables
- explore funding mechanism(s) and confirm the level of interest among stakeholders and the viability of the financial model
- support staff requirements
- work out particulars of transitioning to the operational phase

Feedback on previous versions of this document has raised the following, more specific issues, which are noted here and which shall be resolved by the Founding Committee during the Startup Phase:

- shall membership be open to individuals, for-profit corporations, NGOs, etc?
- is it necessary to create a new organizational entity for LETSI or can one or more existing organizations be leveraged?
- shall the officers be elected by the General Assembly or by the Board?
- what is the most effective composition of the Board in terms of the number of members, elected versus ex-officio participation, etc.?
- how big should the paid staff and initial operating budget be?
- how can balance be built into the policies of the organization to promote open, democratic operations and to prevent any one interest group from dominating?

All decisions shall be ratified by a majority vote of the Founding Committee until a formal, legal entity is formed with approved policies, procedures and bylaws.

This Prospectus was prepared by the Ad Hoc LETSI Committee. For more information about the Federation and the March meeting in London, please contact:

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